
Smiles, Styles, and Profiles: Claim and Acclaim of Ronald Reagan as Charismatic Leader

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Abstract

This paper critically evaluates Ronald Reagan's popular appeal using two theories that have currently regained considerable interest: charisma and authoritarianism. Viewed through these concepts together, the paper argues that Reagan's presidency depended on a charismatic, or in other words, an emotional appeal that fulfills a longing for submission. This longing arises from social conditions and creates a sort of apprehensive, if not fearful insecurity that compels a person to seek out something more powerful than oneself and submissively embrace it as a type of savior or sacred object. This means, in short, that people accept a charismatic claim. Subsequently, the nature of charismatic recognition requires the believer to bow down in submission. The paper suggests that submission to charismatic authority is an example of authoritarian submission, and furthermore suggests a theory that ties together Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority with the theory of authoritarianism in the tradition of Critical Theory.

Introduction

The Prime Minister out of office is seen, too often, to have been but a pompous rhetorician, and the General without an army is but the tame hero of a market town. —W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*

Throughout history, people have hailed certain leaders as charismatic—those rare individuals perceived to possess powers far beyond mortal humans. This power appears to be supernatural, a special divine gift of extraordinary ability. Those who claim such gifts and at the same time find devotion among a group of followers, command as a result absolute obedience. This devotion allows the charismatic leader to overthrow established tradition and/or formal legal practice.

However, even a brief glance at history reveals that such leaders differ considerably from one period to the next, from one culture to another. In fact, the only consistent characteristic seems to be that the public recognizes and in turn accepts the leader as charismatic. The public then submits totally, until the leader seems to lose the charismatic powers. If we recall just a few examples, such as Ghandi, Hitler, Napoleon, Jim Jones, Charles Manson, and the focus of this paper, Ronald Reagan, we see very little similarity in style, manner, appearance, or content of the 'message' to the people. Some obviously were hailed as great heroes—liberators who freed the oppressed, saved the Great Nation from some foreign threat, and so on. Others appear as ingenious and remarkable, yet also extremely cruel and deceitful figures who led their followers, or entire nations, to complete disaster. Some appear as evil incarnate. Yet describing the content of their message fails to resolve two important questions: why do people believe the message in the first place, and is there some underlying commonality to charismatic appeal?

Given that each of these historical figures gained charismatic recognition under vastly different social conditions, and their personal attributes differ considerably, the answer would seem to lie beyond the individual and instead within some larger social process. Many people claim charismatic endowment, but only a few are recognized as legitimate, and some only after their death.¹ If charismatic authority does not flow from some innate quality in the leader, then it must involve a two-way relationship between the leader and the followers. After all, what is a leader without followers?

Instead of merely displaying some innate quality, the leader makes a claim of charisma to the public (the followers). If the public accepts the claim as valid, the public acclaims, that is, recognizes the leader's claim. As long as this relationship between the leader and the public continues, the leader retains legitimate authority on the basis of charisma. The moment at which the public ceases to recognize the claim, or in other words, the moment the public ceases to believe, the leader loses legitimacy and becomes an unjust tyrant. These are the basic tenets of the social theory of charismatic authority.²

¹ For example, only three people believed in Jesus Christ enough to stand by him when he died on the cross.

² I do not mean to oversimplify or over-generalize here. There are in fact certain consistent characteristics in the way in which the demagogue structures the content of the 'message,' although the particular call to action differs according to time, place, and political orientation. See Lowenthal, Leo and Norbert Guterman. [1949] 1970. *Prophets of*

Ronald Reagan has been known both in the popular media, and in academic circles, as a leader who in some sense possesses charismatic qualities. However, scholars by no means agree on the source or exact nature of these attributes. Two positions predominate. In the first case, the so-called realists contend that political charisma, and its counterpart political demonology (negative charisma) is a description of the charismatic hero (or enemy). That is, the leader or other representative depicts the leader or the enemy in symbolic terms which, although exaggerations, contain some element of truth about the leader or the enemy. The symbolic representations are founded in fact at some level. The basic validity of claims that political figures make are not questioned.

In contrast, the symbolists, according to Rogin (1987) emphasize the mythical proportions of the leader and the supposed enemy, but they tend to overlook the real political and economic interests that political mythology often conceals. Thus, Rogin concludes his book with a call for a union of the two approaches "that takes seriously the demonological worldview and its latent, unconscious meanings" (Rogin 1987: 274). However distorted, or even hallucinatory the visions may be, they serve a political-economic need to separate symbol from reality, and consequently to establish political malaise, if not active support, based on a mythical perception of concrete material issues. The goal, from the leader's perspective and his/her power brokers, is to rally support for real political-economic goals based on unreal and emotional sentiment.

This leads to serious questions about our society. Rogin assumes a need for political leadership to intentionally misrepresent their goals, and to gain popular support by deluding the public. Furthermore, this misrepresentation is more than simple lying, but rather involves a distortion of the true agenda using popular imagery and beliefs about the world. Why do people accept mythical visions of reality? What methods do leaders employ to legitimate their mythical worldview? Indeed, Critical Theory, as developed by the Frankfurt School, arose with such problems in mind.

Yet, people are not forced to believe misrepresentations of reality. Despite extensive research that applies and tests many concepts associated with authoritarianism since 1950, a major question remains. If people submit to leaders because the leaders appear to be superior

Deceit. Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books and Willner, Ann Ruth. 1984. *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*. New Haven: Yale University Press for a detailed analysis.

or 'have all the answers', in what sense do they see them as superior and all-knowing? What need or perception of the world does a charismatic claim appeal to and satisfy? I argue that the key lies in the social construction of a magical, that is, charismatic aura around the leader, which then legitimates the mythical worldview. As the public elevates the leader to exalted status, submission becomes self-legitimizing. If a person is seen to have supernatural abilities, what else can a person do except kneel in subservience?

This process of construction inherently involves a level of active acclaim from the public. Secondly, charismatic claims appear 'real' to some people because they seem to fit with established cultural imagery and seem to fulfill familiar legends or beliefs. The case of Ronald Reagan illustrates both the social construction of charismatic authority and the extent to which established cultural beliefs create conditions that make the public more willing to accept charismatic claims.

Authority and Charisma

To best understand charisma and its relation to authority, it will be useful to begin with an understanding of conventional authority. In contemporary times, our institutions operate overwhelmingly according to bureaucratic principles. In corporations and governmental agencies, in universities, in public and private schools, at the workplace, and whenever people ask to 'see the manager,' almost everyone is familiar with bureaucratic hierarchy.

Usually, modern organizations function according to formal procedures and legal precedent within a clearly established relationship of offices, duties, responsibilities, and functions. In other words, most organizations, whether public or private, almost always employ a bureaucratic structure to conduct day to day affairs. In brief, a systematic bureaucracy may be described in ideal-typical terms as follows:

The fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production. Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, education of function and of material and personal costs-- these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration... (Weber 1978 Vol II, p. 973).

Thus, modern rational-legal authority relies on formal procedure, with clearly delineated jurisdiction, written rules, and technical

requirements of each office. In the pure form, the leader, or more accurately, the highest ranking official, serves on the basis of technical qualifications. This would include the President of the United States.

Regarding everyday affairs, institutional bureaucracy is described in *Economy and Society* (Weber 1978), as "structures of everyday life" that revolve around the economy. That is, both "are concerned with normal want satisfaction" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1111) which in this context means material satisfaction—food, shelter, and security, for example. Bureaucracy arises to manage the production and exchange of goods and services. Bureaucracy is a system of management designed to make large-scale organizations run in a rational manner. 'Rational' in this sense means efficiently and predictably.

Those things that fall outside of the rational management of economic production and exchange find fulfillment in an entirely different manner, that is, "on a charismatic basis" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1111). Sometimes, people attempt to fulfill very real material necessities, such as food, shelter, and security, through irrational means, through charismatic leadership. This occurs especially in times of social turmoil and uncertainty.

As recent research shows, this often takes the form of rapid social change that causes people to reconsider values that seemed to be eternal. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Laquer (1996) finds a sudden upsurge in neo-fascist and reactionary clerical membership. Similarly, Lamy (1996) finds an upsurge in specifically American millennialism and doomsday cults. However, both researchers point out that contemporary groups typically reshuffle the ideology and myths from earlier times, in an attempt to interpret the rapid social and political changes of the present day. For example, Satan is no longer threatening the U.S. in the form of the Soviet Union, but now through vast networks of satanic cults to convert teenagers to gang life, drug use, violence, and destruction of the family (Victor 1993). We are now one step closer to the apocalypse as Satan brings the battle closer to home (Lamy 1996). Although rock music, especially heavy metal, has long been thought of as 'evil' and the cause of delinquency (Verden, Dunleavy, and Powers 1989) it becomes literally the "sounds of Satan" for some in the face of job loss and political change (Weinstein 1991).

When social problems intensify, Weber sees two primary responses, on the one hand reason, and on the other hand faith—the basis of charisma. Each however, defines the problem and works for solutions in entirely different ways. Reason "alters the situations of life and

hence its problems" (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.245) which means that reason attempts to rectify the causes of the problem by making some concrete change in society based on empirical observation and analysis. In direct contrast, charisma does not address the causes of social problems through empirical analysis, but rather seeks "a subjective or internal reorientation... in a radical alteration of the central attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation" (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.245). More specifically, "charisma, in its most potent forms, disrupts rational rule as well as tradition altogether and overturns notions of sanctity." Charismatic authority plays on the emotions and beliefs of people; as Weber says, "it enforces the inner subjection to the unprecedented and absolutely unique" power which is charisma (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1117). Essentially, "the power of charisma rests upon the belief in revelation and heroes" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1116). As such, it attempts to alleviate social problems through magical means, and those who claim leadership or the ability to correct social problems on the basis of charisma, claim this power of magic through divine endowment. Reason defines the problem and seeks solutions based on logic and observation. Charisma defines problems based on emotion; it creates 'change' by changing the way people interpret the problem. As Weber argues, charisma appeals to inner emotion and psychic disposition. Thus, its ability to actually manage daily affairs and solve social problems is incidental. As God says to the Good Woman of Sezhuan in Brecht's play, the neighboring village flooded because they did not maintain the dam properly, not because they failed to pray hard enough. Similarly, I argue that Reagan defined problems based on charismatic claims, and thus offered charismatic solutions which failed to address actual social, political, and economic reality.

To the extent people accept charismatic claims, this means that people have given up on reason as a means to deal with problems, and instead hope for deliverance through some sort of magical powers or divine grace even though "pure charisma is specifically foreign to economic considerations" (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.244). For Weber, charisma, magic, divine grace, and the like simply do not exist as such, but instead all ideas and attributes, "whether religious, artistic, ethical, scientific, or whatever else" (Weber 1978 Vol. II., p.1116) derive from social origins, both psychological and structural.

Weber clearly argues for a socially based perspective, that establishes charisma as a social process, as an ongoing relationship between the holder of charisma and the people. The specific characteristics that people perceive as signs of charisma, and also the social role of charisma, both depend entirely on the sociohistorical context. If

charisma does not exist in reality and depends entirely on public acknowledgement, the recognition of charismatic power is always tentative. Weber defines charismatic authority thus:

The term charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These as such are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader' (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.241).

The exact attributes that a person must possess who would claim leadership on this basis depends on the specific circumstances. For example, Weber writes that such a person "gains and retains it solely by proving his powers in practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1114). To be more exact, a person must do things that are perceived as charismatic, that is, perceived as supernatural or superhuman. However, despite any other achievements, one particular requirement overrides all others. Weber says that "most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by bringing well-being to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1114). This latter aspect proves crucial for Napoleon, for example, because it is exactly what he promised for the people of France, but could never actually deliver. Despite certain gains, he led France to endless war and ultimately collapse. The same is true for Hitler, for Mussolini, for Idi-Amin, for Pol Pot, for Juan Peron.

Consequently, failure to provide well-being for the followers causes support for the charismatic claimant to fall away and likewise the status as leader. Clearly, Weber sees the public in a very active role; the people must acclaim the charismatic qualities within the claimant and in so doing project the status as leader. The masses continue to play an active role throughout the claimant's tenure as leader. Charisma only exists if and to the extent that people acknowledge it.

If the public acknowledges the charismatic claim as valid, they must likewise bow down in subservience. Acknowledgement means deference regarding the issue of leadership and authority. For Weber, the individual's charisma in no way actually flows from some supernatural source, but rather "what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority" and most importantly that "it is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of

charisma" (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.242). If the followers or believers acknowledge the claim, "it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority... to act accordingly" (Weber 1978 Vol. I, p.242). So long as the public recognition (acclaim) of the person as charismatic continues, this "mere fact of recognizing the personal mission of a charismatic master establishes his power" (Weber 1978 Vol. II, p.1115). To acclaim charismatic endowment inherently means "the surrender of the faithful to the extraordinary and unheard-of" to which all tradition and regulation is irrelevant, except that it must bring well-being to the followers. In any case, recognition and subservience inextricably occur simultaneously through an ongoing process of claim and acclaim.

Competing Theories of Charisma

In clear divergence from Weber, others argue that certain special and extraordinary people possess certain characteristics which they can use to manipulate and in turn control people. The charismatic person actually holds some real and tangible power or attribute. If the powers are great enough, they can control a lot of people, even large crowds or entire nations as Le Bon ([1888] 1960) contends.

In the case of leadership and authority, Freud argues more specifically that the leader possesses a unique force of will that can seize and control the minds of the masses. The leader's ability to manipulate the masses depends on the relative strength of the leader compared to the relative weakness of the individual will of the masses. If the individual will of the follower is sufficiently weak, virtually devoid of conscious thought and will, combined with a state of emotional insecurity and material uncertainty, a charismatically powerful leader can easily take control. For Freud, charisma is something the leader actually wields; it is an attribute that truly exists whether other people acknowledge its existence or not. For example, many charismatic claims have been made for Napoleon, which typify the nature of charismatic claims generally: exceptional strategic military ability, compelling personality and oratory skills, even such things as a piercing stare or a projective aura that somehow commands respect and obedience. Neither Le Bon nor Freud attribute actual mythical qualities to the leader, but they do argue that leaders and other great figures in history possess some sort of psychological superiority grounded in biological attributes.

The follower, a mere mortal bereft of their own special powers and lacking a will to confront the problems of the day, is especially susceptible to the wiles of the charismatic demi-god. Smith reviews

the core of Freud's theory, that leaders with compelling charisma "entirely rule the subject" and that "in a nutshell, the leader is intrinsically charismatic and dominant. The subject, by contrast, is utterly alienated" (Smith 1992, p.208). Smith summarizes the main elements of Freud's theory:

In all, three main elements are posited; an instinct to comply; a father relationship which converts this instinct into a passive masochistic reflex; and a charismatic leader who compels surrender by manipulating the passivity reflex. Autocratic surrender is hence defined as instinctive, the result of a reflex action triggered by authority (Smith 1992, p.209).

Thus we see the biological elements of the theory, that some (most?) people are born with a herd instinct, which in social practice manifests as an unconscious reflex because of separation from the father, the natural authority figure. The desire for an authority becomes more pronounced after the person breaks from the father, and society, especially modern society, fails to provide an adequate replacement. The individual thus feels alone, without direction, without purpose.

After the socially conditioned break from the father, the person instinctively seeks an authoritative replacement, yet the person does not actively acknowledge authority nor endow the leader with authority, but instead the masses passively and reflexively submit to the inherent powers of the leader. Freud's theory does not depend on historical circumstances, since the passive reflex to authoritative submission begins at the innate biological level. Also important in this theory is the point that the leader has inherent charismatic powers that emanate from a superior psychological structure, whereas the masses have only an instinctual and social-psychologically fomented reflex for submission. Without an authority, the public becomes lost and social order breaks down.

Although Freud argues that the masses are inherently weak-willed, and the leader inherently psychically strong, the leader's charisma is still social in the sense that it depends on a relation between leader and follower. Although logical to some extent, it cannot answer some fairly fundamental questions. If Hitler had such a profoundly powerful will as many claim, why didn't he simply apply his superior bearing and subdue other Nazi leaders to serve his will? Why did he need to resort to the Night of the Long Knives to solidify his power? Why even fight a war at all? Why not force the allies to make concession through sheer force of will?

Lastly, some hold a 'true-believer' position. Hoffer (1951) finds that charisma is a matter of faith, that for the true-believer the leader holds actual supernatural powers. Basically, this position argues that charismatic powers really do exist, that god(s) may at exceptional moments endow certain people with special powers. Sometimes, the true believer sees Nature, rather than some conscious deity, as the source of charismatic power, but in any case, the source of charisma is entirely external to and above society. Charisma is thus supernatural, permanent, and inherent in the individual regardless of public perception. It exists beyond human understanding, or even question.

Similarly, some maintain that the authoritarian impulse arises from some innate or metaphysical essence, and that words or phrases, spoken in the correct tone or manner, convey some kind of inherent persuasive power. Explanations vary from mob-psychology theories, such as LeBon ([1887] 1960) who views the crowd as a collection of mindless beasts of inferior will and temperament, to recent literary and post-modern theories such as Percy (1996) who argues that the songs and pronouncements in contemporary Christian revivalism, for example, convey an inherent influential power. People are persuaded "via a matrix of metaphors, themes, and forms that create an ideological community of feeling" (Percy 1996: 70). Certain stories, words, and messages deliver a compelling power that assimilates the individual. Taken to its logical conclusion, the mass rally embodies the metaphysical purity of idea and aesthetics. It satisfies the adherents longing for exaltation of one's own sense of perfection, while denying it to those that do not fit the ideal of beauty (Derrida 1990; Lacoue-Labarthe 1990).

In conclusion, the social theory of charisma stands in stark contrast to the purely psychological and true-believer perspectives. In the social view, the charismatic leader is constructed by a relationship between the believers and the claims of the leader, which draw on existing social values, images and metaphors, and appeal to the root insecurity of the individual. In the social view, charisma only exists to the extent that people perceive it to exist and then act accordingly; charisma cannot at the same time have being in-itself. However, as the sociologist W.I. Thomas remarked, "if people believe something to be real, it will be real in its consequences." Charisma can have a very real impact as if it were in fact real. However, if Weber is correct that charisma is the result of social interaction, all charismatic claims are false claims. If people recognize the claim as valid, they recognize a false claim. Yet so long as people accept the claim, they must, by the

nature of charismatic approval, bow down in submission. The theory of authoritarianism speaks to this aspect, which I will address later.

Charisma and Authoritarianism

So how do we know that Ronald Reagan was a charismatic leader in the sociological sense? The following discussion will suggest that overall, Reagan's popularity depended on emotional appeal. Although his political programs were sometimes presented with a veneer of rationality (for example, Reaganomics) his policies delivered primarily emotional satisfaction with a strongly interwoven morality. In this way he fulfilled what much of the public sought—a sense of security and certainty.

If charisma is socially constructed, neither real in-itself or a purely psychological phenomenon, what is the link between the individual and society that results in charismatic acclaim? To answer this question, I suggest that people must willingly suspend their disbelief, so to speak, and submit to imagery and beliefs that otherwise appear illogical and even fantastical. This willingness arises from social conditions that create a particular mindset, an authoritarian mindset.

The most basic element of authoritarianism is the desire to either rule over someone (or something) if the object is perceived as weaker or in various ways inferior, coupled with a simultaneous desire to submit to someone (or something) perceived to be more powerful or superior. For the authoritarian, the leader is viewed as such because s/he is seen to possess superior powers beyond the reach of mundane people.

More specifically, Fromm ([1941] 1994) established the basic elements, that authoritarianism consists of the following elements: **sadism**-- the desire to dominate; **masochism**-- the desire to submit; **destructiveness**-- the desire to annihilate the object rather than control it or be controlled; and **conformity**-- the desire to disappear in the crowd, so to speak—to remain nameless and faceless. Underlying all of this is a lack of self-confidence, feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and the inability to control one's life or to understand the world. Although conceptually distinct, they typically overlap in practice, even if one in particular predominates. Most relevant to the study of charismatic authority, the masochistic personality seeks security in two ways. The first is to destroy the self, to sycophantically adopt the will of another as one's own. In comparison:

The other side is the attempt to become a part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside of oneself, to submerge and participate in it. This power can be a person, an institution, God, the nation, conscience, or a psychic compulsion. By becoming part of a power which is unshakably strong, eternal, glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory (Fromm [1941] 1994, p.154).

This desire for submission often inspires a person to actively seek out something to submit to, but in any case, the 'eternal force' is something constructed at the social-psychological level; leaders never actually have supernatural 'charismatic' powers; gods do not walk the earth.

Although a person typically encounters external people, groups, or systems that can and do exercise power and control, for example a physically stronger person, the boss, the police, or the government, the masochist does not submit to rational authority or the recognition of actual power. Rather, the masochist constructs, or builds a sort of mystical aura around some real person or other thing, and this mystical aspect, more than the real aspect, is the basis of submission. This explains, as Fromm says, that "a mouse or a leaf can assume threatening features" (Fromm [1941] 1992, p.151). However, as Fromm (1984, [1970] 1996) demonstrated in two empirical studies, and extensive studies³ up to the present day show that authoritarian tendencies greatly increase during sudden and especially declining social change. Whatever omnipresent material grievances provoke a longing for authority, the fact remains that such feelings must exist before or in conjunction with the emergence of the leader. Otherwise, during socially stable times, the political charismatic claim falls flat.

Thus, the status of Ronald Reagan as charismatic leader results from a public predisposition coupled with widespread social conditions. The interaction, that is, the communication between leader and followers occurs over ideological sentiments, but must also account for social conditions that inspire an unfocused discontent in the first place. More exactly, this means the leader issues a vision, so to speak, and the public may or may not follow it.

One significant ramification then, is that the actual material accomplishments while in office, although important politically, have only partial bearing on his legitimacy as leader. Charismatically based

³ For an excellent summary of studies in authoritarianism, see Stone, William F., Gerda Lederer, and Richard Christie. 1993. *Strength and Weakness: The Authoritarian Personality Today*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

authority is extremely unstable; support could fall away at any moment. However, so long as the leader enjoys recognition, virtually any statement is perceived as truth, almost any action seen as an accomplishment. Followers essentially believe whatever the leader says; they uncritically accept as truth whatever the leader proclaims to be the truth, whether past, present, or future. In other words, the followers acknowledge, which means to fully and unquestioningly accept, the leader's vision. This view, this vision may overturn all previously conceived notions; it disrupts convention, and often violates rules of logic and systematic analysis.

As an example, Willner records that an Indonesian worker believed that the Indonesian language was the most widely spoken language in the world after English:

probing disclosed that the basis for his belief was someone's assurance that Sukarno had said this in one of his speeches. If Sukarno had said it, he stubbornly repeated, it must be true. It became clear that the only way we could have shaken his conviction would have been to persuade him that Sukarno had not made such a statement (Willner 1984, p.25-26).

In the same way, Reagan retained personal popularity and therefore legitimacy as leader, despite very low public job approval. As Reagan's job performance rating plummeted to only 35% approval in January 1983 (which inversely corresponded to double digit unemployment) his personal approval rating remained in the 60-70% range (Heertsgaard 1988, p.152). Thus, if Reagan or his appointed representatives announced that steps were being taken to solve America's problems, the problem must lie elsewhere, somewhere separate from the administration. Notice here also how charismatic acclaim functions. Despite overt policy failures, The public nevertheless recognized Reagan's charisma, and still supported him personally. In the political realm at least, charisma provides a shield from public dissatisfaction and separates the leader from failure. If he is the charismatic leader, he cannot fail, so the evident failure must have some other source. The masses feel at once upset about poor employment prospects, but also reassured that at least Ronald Reagan is in charge.

Just as the public must "fare well" materially in order for the leader to maintain charismatic acclaim, so the public must feel, on an emotional level, that the leader is still confronting the enemies of the people. Indeed, Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970) and Mazlish (1976)

demonstrate that charismatic leaders usually deliver a message of austerity and personal denial, that we must embark on a period of deprivation before we can reach a better tomorrow. This emotional satisfaction develops from successful confrontation, defeat of, and eternal vigilance against the enemies, whoever or whatever they may be. The irrational, non-systematic, anti-logical nature of charismatic authority derives precisely from the fact that emotional satisfaction, far more than logical confrontation of problems and pursuit of interests, configures charismatic recognition.

Decisively, the status of Ronald Reagan (or anyone who claims charismatic power) as charismatic leader does not depend on observable differences between what he promised and the material conditions his administration objectively delivered. Nor does it depend on conscious mass public recognition of the leader as magically or divinely endowed. Instead, charismatic status depends on uncritical emotional commitment to the person of the leader, or to the leader as the embodiment of some mission or vision, regardless of apparent contradictions, regardless of apparent or inferable impractical applicability of the message as policy, and oblivious to potential material outcome. He succeeds as a leader generally, and retains charismatic status specifically, to the extent that he continues to deliver emotional satisfaction. In this emotional sense, his followers must "fare well" as Weber says, "or else he is not the god-sent master." In this way also, charismatic authority remains irrational. This is not to say that emotional appeal can override material need indefinitely. In fact, the opposite is true; charismatic authority is short-lived and uncertain. My point is that so long as the public accept the charismatic claim, it overrides other concerns, however brief.

But a would-be leader cannot simply make claims and expect acclaim in return. Since the process is social, the claims must not only appeal to the characterological insecurities of the receiver, but must also fit in accordance with established cultural beliefs, images, and legends, as a means to organize unfocused resentment and 'explain' the sad state of affairs. Otherwise, the claims are just words.

Rather, the road to charismatic acclaim follows a particular course according to established cultural images and beliefs. The charismatic leader articulates "a dream world" that forms the basis of "sentiments and actions" of people who would acclaim the leader (Goodrick-Clarke 1992, p.1; Laquer 1996). Willner describes a process by which a leader first links him/herself to some mythic image or narrative. In political charisma specifically, Willner writes that "first is the assimilation of a leader to one or more dominant myths of the society

or culture" (Willner 1984: 61). To this conceptualization, Mazlish adds that the charismatic political leader typically claims to stand for the mythical reality in an absolute or pure form. That is, whatever virtues and feelings the myth contains, the leader claims to be the pure embodiment of those sentiments (Mazlish 1976). Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970) draw similar conclusions, but argue additionally that the leader may claim to be only a representative, rather than the embodiment of, some higher power. As we will see, Ronald Reagan sometimes implies the former, but usually states the latter.

The Role of the Leader

The leader or the leader's representatives typically play on public uncertainty, and attempt to interpret social problems in charismatic terms. As Willner (1984, p.60-61) shows, the leader or the leader's representative becomes a catalyst in the process of acclaim. This complements Lowenthal and Guterman (1970) who focus on the actions of the leader as agitator. The leader's persuasion techniques (if social conditions are right) turn inchoate but powerful feelings into specific beliefs that convert already existing prejudices, tendencies, and superstitions into ideological doctrine, and eventually into action (Adorno 1950, p.vii). Basically, this means that already present feelings, which develop according to social conditions and which correspond to vaguely directed but omnipresent grievances, turn into specific and formal doctrine and action. The leader provides an object onto which the followers project their prejudices and superstitions. The leader identifies the formerly nameless and faceless 'other.'

The inchoate feelings depend on the given culture in a specific historical time and place. That is, feelings develop according to popular perceptions, beliefs, and awareness of culturally specific myths and attendant symbols or rituals. Symbols, signs, myths, narratives, and so on that carry great meaning in one culture have little or no meaning to another. In any case, objectively common to all popular myths is that it diverges from actual historical time and place and appears timeless. Thus, the charismatic leader invokes and refers to mythic time, which "is without measure or finitude" (Willner 1979, p.402). Myths usually carry messages about supposed universal or everlasting truth about life and human relations. In politics, the successful linkage of mythic time with actual events "explains the past and the present as well as the future" (Levi-Strauss 1955, p.403). Crucially, it follows that "events occurring in historic time, including the immediate past and present, can become endowed with the

quality of myth if they fit or can be fitted into the pattern of traditional myth" (Willner and Willner 1965, p.83). First and foremost, the leader plays the catalyst who fits real time historic events or social conditions to mythic messages and imagery, and thereby creates the dreamworld that blurs fiction and reality. Yet in this process, the leader does not clarify or explain real conditions, but translates them into emotional terms, and then offers emotional solutions to what the leader redefines as a moral problem that is out of synch with the mythic and timeless truth. Overall, the leader substantiates the charismatic claim by linking with "one or more of the dominant myths of his society or culture" (Willner 1984, p.61).

At the same time, the leader attaches these dominant myths to actual people and groups. At the individual level, this appeal allows a person to resolve an inner psychic conflict through acceptance of mythical and supposedly universal truths. Authoritarian submission to myth and charismatically perceived higher powers creates an inherent contradiction in the individual's personality, and thus "the authoritarian *must*, out of an inner necessity, turn his aggression against outgroups" (Adorno, [1950] 1982: 162). Because the person cannot challenge the authority to which they hold as superior and perfect, and to which they must therefore submit, the true problem must lie elsewhere. They can only vent frustration and aggression against a constructed, outgroup that is mythically and universally evil, just as the ingroup is mythically and universally good. The outgroup is a negative counterpart and immoral abomination that threatens to contaminate the sanctity of one's own pure and sacred ingroup (Levinson [1950] 1982, p.98-100).

Since the overall charismatic/authoritarian claim is essentially mythical, the authoritarian does not condemn and attack actual deficiencies, nor address specific and observable problems as such. Rather, in order to lessen the anxiety and tension that submission to the ingroup leader creates, since such submission intensifies rather than assuages isolation and emotional dissatisfaction, the authoritarian submissive is driven by psychological contradictions and compulsions "to see immoral attributes in [the outgroup] whether this has a basis in fact or not" (Adorno [1950] 1982, p.162).

Even as a person submits to the will of the leader, they simultaneously free themselves from responsibility. Authoritarian submission "indicates a tendency to shift responsibility from within the individual onto outside forces beyond one's control" and most importantly this shift occurs in "a nonrealistic way by making the

individual fate dependent on more or less fantastic factors" (Adorno [1950] 1982, p.165). Thus, the individual bears no responsibility for their actions that may result from submission to such external systems of thought. Although in modern society the ability of a person to determine one's own fate is in reality limited, superstition depends on irrational and subconscious insecurities rather than a shrewd analysis of actual social structures and the limitations (or possible emancipations) they might impose.

To summarize thusfar, the charismatic process of claim and acclaim occurs thus:

- 1) Widespread social problems instill unfocused resentment in some segments of the general population.
- 2) A 'leader' claims to have all the answers, articulated in terms of established and popularly familiar prejudices, myths, stereotypes, and maxims. The message usually calls for moral reform.
- 3) People who accept the message find solace and certainty, that this person/movement/ideology will fix everything. The leader and his/her dreamworld vision is acclaimed, and the followers submit in order to carry out the leader's commands.

Morality and Mythology

Ronald Reagan invoked a mythology based on an American version of the work ethic, with a special emphasis on personal morality and self-sacrifice. In short, this ethic holds that endless toil and absolute focus on one's work to the total exclusion of other interests constitutes the highest virtue in life, and the only path to salvation. The ethic promotes endless hard work, often strict self-denial of pleasure (deferred gratification), combined with almost total individuality. The ascetic work ethic thus reinforces the notion that individual action is always preferable to collective action. Hard work leads to higher stations in life, and ultimately to salvation. Without recounting Weber's ([1920] 1976) argument about the rise and installation of the Protestant ethic as a general secular ethic, it suffices to say that a powerful work ethic (whatever its source) forms the basis of much popular folk mythology in the U.S. today. This usually takes the form of a 'rags to riches' story, the famous Horatio Alger tales. It is precisely this myth that promises higher stations in life as the reward for hard work, that nothing else matters except personal virtue, and individual

actions always achieves more and is morally preferable over collective action.⁴

However, such rhetoric of so-called traditional American values of thrift, personal moral purity, and hard work would provoke little response unless people generally believed that America had strayed away from them. Indeed, the belief that America has become morally bankrupt, or even actively immoral, has pervaded popular sentiments for decades. Adorno and his colleagues conducted extensive research into American sociopolitical perceptions throughout the 1940's, and discovered beliefs that sexual permissiveness and depravity is undermining our society. In addition, such people typically believe that various supernatural and mystical forces determine the fate of individuals and of nations; therefore, America requires leaders who personally stand above sinful carnal temptations and corruption who embody divine purpose which seeks to expose and destroy the moral threats to our society (Adorno 1950, p.222-279). Since 1950, numerous studies confirm the presence of authoritarian attitudes, especially the emphasis on declining morality as the basis of social problems and the need for a strong leader to return us to the path of righteousness.

For example, Lederer (1993) and McFarland et al. (1993) find connections between absolute moral impulses and an attraction to the politics of emotion. In earlier studies, Adelson (1953), Altemeyer (1997, 1988, 1981), and Rokeach (1960) demonstrate a definite empirical correlation between "close-mindedness" and submission to conventional values, with a corresponding hostility to people or groups seen to violate standards of normalcy and decency. Altemeyer (1997, 1988) likewise confirms the central role of "conventionalism" as a form of close-mindedness and a belief that deviance from 'universal' truth and morality is the root of social problems. Research further shows that rigid attitudes of 'good' and 'bad' correspond to traditional regional variations in racial prejudice, religious intolerance, and generally conservative values. In the United States, two studies in particular, Pettigrew (1959) and Middleton (1976) use large samples and demonstrate clear relationships, that the rural areas in general are most conservative and authoritarian than urban areas, and the rural White South most decidedly so. Other research draws the same conclusions, which directly tests for regional variation, both in the

⁴ For a recent exegesis on the virtues of hard work and hard work as the highest earthly morality, see Handley, Rod. 1995. *Character Counts*. Grand Island, Nebraska: Cross Training Publishing. Also Addington, Thomas and Stephen Graves. 1997. *A Case for Serving, Character, and Calling*. Fayetteville, Arkansas: Cornerstone Alliance.

U.S. (Christie and Garcia 1951; Schooler 1972; Williams 1966) and in Europe (Meloan and Middendorp 1991; Schooler 1976).

Reagan's Charisma: The Crusade Against Immorality

American charismatic claims sometimes conceal their oppressive nature, because they use an ideology of individualism and independence that is common throughout American culture, yet at the same time emphasizes the need for unity around a specific belief or cause. Its most unusual, and at least superficially paradoxical feature is the joining of opposites, such that, for example, it celebrates diversity and freedom of opinion, yet calls upon all true Americans to follow a specific path. We must be diverse, yet alike; free thinking, yet think along particular lines.

Unlike their European counterparts, American extremists usually do not call for a single-minded obedience that overrules individual opinion and initiative. Rather, Lipset and Raab argue that American extremists call for a "monistic impulse" that oversimplifies complex social issues and conditions and thus "an unambiguous ascription of single causes and remedies for multifaceted phenomena" (Lipset and Raab [1970] 1978, p.7). American reactionism thus approaches nearly any issue from a moralistic standpoint generally, and such groups become extremist as the ideology moves towards the farthest extension of a moralistic worldview—the Conspiracy. However, the call for action revolves around a moral issue that ultimately forms the singular basis of virtue or depravity. It is not a matter of obedience to a cause as such, which requires explicit restrictions on individuality, but rather the need to recognize and remove both from oneself and from society, this moral failure. Moral truth is the only fundamental truth, and thus it preempts and is the basis of all other concerns. It is the one essential and common element.

Political issues become a struggle between morality and immorality, good against evil, us against them. The righteous and moral side (within the context of American culture) includes those who seek to re-institute the mythical past, as opposed to the enemy—the Other—who would continue with the status quo, or worse, overthrow the remnants of the great society and lead us to perversity, indulgence, moral chaos, and a nameless, faceless collectivity that suppresses all individuality. As Levinson defines it, us and them translates to ingroup and outgroup respectively; the ingroup embodies all desirable traits (hard work, self-reliance, thrift, moral virtue, abstinence) with none of the negative ones, whereas the outgroup embodies all opposed

qualities (laziness, indulgence, sexual perversity, wastefulness, dependency, etc) with no virtuous qualities (Levinson 1950, p.145-148). As an example, Levinson says that "what is called power-seeking and clannishness in the outgroup transforms into moral righteousness, self-defense, and loyalty in the ingroup" (Levinson 1950, p.149). The authoritarian does not seek to change society, but rather to restore it by eliminating undesirable elements which undermine its sanctity. In this sense, authoritarianism becomes a reactionary movement based on a mythical past.

In fact, we find that shortly before the 1980 Presidential election, the public commonly perceived that government officials, the mass media, and people in positions of power and influence generally held views which not only condone but indulge prurient interests. For example, in a 1980 study conducted just before the election, 71% of the general public believed that homosexuality was morally wrong, whereas only 51% of business executives believed so, 38% of people working in the mass media, 36% of government workers, 30% of educators, and 27% of research scientists, lawyers, and physicians (White 1990, p.41). This pattern continues over a number of controversial issues, including abortion, lesbianism, smoking marijuana, and sex before the age of 16 (White 1990, p.41). Overall, a separate study from the same time confirms that nearly 80% of the population felt that "the country was heading in the wrong direction" (Heertsgaard 1988, p.26). Moreover, White suggests that the public perceived Jimmy Carter to be indifferent on moral issues, in addition to the fact that his administration seemed practically ineffective on economic issues (White 1990, p.48-49).

Thus, Reagan did not entirely initiate the ingroup/outgroup value conflict, but rather seized upon these pre-existing sentiments and directed them onto particular opponents, which he often portrayed in an extreme form. The need for value rediscovery as a political theme and a solution to social problems was not a new tactic for Reagan in the 1980 campaign, but one he used successfully during his first gubernatorial campaign. At that time, Reagan declared the central theme of this and all later campaigns:

I am deeply concerned with the wave of hedonism-- the humanist philosophy so prevalent today-- and believe this nation must have a spiritual rebirth, a redirection to the moral precepts which guided us for so much of our past, and we must have such a rebirth very soon (in von Damm 1976, p.84).

In this quote, we see all the common themes in charismatic rhetoric in the American context. First, the concern of sexual goings on and

indulgence of worldly pleasures. These carnal desires threaten not only religious spiritual salvation, but this rhetoric suggests also that moral depravity threatens the national economy and national security—such people lack the desire to work and the will to fight. Secondly, we see the indictment of tolerance, an attack on the "humanist philosophy" that ultimately leads once again to moral relativism and indifference. The true spiritual and godly morality, while sometimes forgiving, also requires hard work, devotion, and sacrifice. The outgroup forces dilute the strength and status of the nation.

Cumulatively, the effect of political moralism is the call for political unity; those who call for pluralism are not only un-patriotic, but immoral. In short, "this is the ultimate product of moralism rigorously applied and the heart of the monistic impulse: error is arguable, evil intent is not; ...Differences, cleavages, pluralism, ambiguity, based on evil intent are illegitimate" (Lipset and Raab [1970] 1978, p.14). Despite the ethic of individualism, diversity becomes not only undesirable, but the mark of a sinister moral depravity and broad conspiracy. However, Ronald Reagan claimed to be only God's messenger, and not a divine figure himself. In effect, his charismatic claim depended on association, that God chose him as an earthly representative for a Great Purpose: "I have come to realize that whatever I do has meaning only if I ask that it serves His purpose... I believe that in the present undertaking, whatever the outcome, it will be His doing. I pray for understanding of what it is He would have me do" (in von Damm 1976, p.88). Reagan claimed to represent and serve a higher power, which one cannot deny without incurring the wrath of God. Notice that "whatever the outcome," or in other words, even if the administration fails miserably, it is not Reagan's fault, but actually a positive thing, since it is the will of God; the Reagan administration is only a conduit for a higher power and thus bears no responsibility.

What about the duties of office? The president must function as a policy leader and decision-maker on very real economic and political issues. Reagan needed to demonstrate that solid and wholesome moral values translate into effective policy. Regarding economic reform, Reagan advocated the removal of governmental regulations on industry, not ostensibly as the result of careful and systematic study or even thoughtful theoretical reasoning, but primarily for moral and ideological reasons. Thus, he stated that we must remove government intervention in business:

to restore the freedom of all men and women to create, and to leave our children the opportunities of liberty in a land where every

individual has the opportunity to be whatever God intended us to be (New York Times Feb 6th, 1981: A12).

In this passage, Reagan immediately relates structural political economy in terms of individual freedom and creative expression. Not only does this promote individuality for its own sake, but in typical ascetic fashion, it allows each person to discover their calling and to serve God's will. Reagan wants "to restore" the glorious of the past (the mythical past) where everyone worked an honest day's work and received an honest wage—they don't clamor for higher wages and certainly don't expect government handouts. Overall, the speech implicitly identifies our current practices as immoral, even sinful renunciations of divine ordinance.

In retrospect, it seems starkly obvious that Reaganomics could only mean disaster in the long run. Significant tax cuts, coupled with lax enforcement or elimination of economic regulations, and massive military spending increases could only generate a huge deficit, as it in fact did.⁵ In reality, although sold as an economic plan, Reaganomics "was in fact, a form of symbolic politics, a means of liberating middle class Americans from government tyranny and eliminating moral deficits" (Dallek 1984, p.64) such as supposed preferential treatment for lazy welfare cheats. Those who supposedly do not want to work deserve no consideration.

Although Reagan campaigned to get big government off the backs of so-called average Americans, he also invoked the "monistic impulse" that calls for moral, and therefore political unity. Thus, even as we should 'free' industry and personal acquisition, since hard work is a moral virtue, he also advocated governmental intervention into private lives where immoral acts may occur. On issues such as the freedom of speech and abortion, Reagan clearly and decisively pushed for governmental restrictions. For abortion in particular, he initially sought to deny access to abortion even in cases of rape, incest, and endangerment to the mother's life (Le Jon 1988, p.103-104). Furthermore, Reagan commented in his final state of the union address in 1988 that not only must we guarantee the rights of the unborn, but this issue challenges our moral resolve and the overall well-being of the nation. We must staunchly avoid so called easy and lazy solutions. The greater success or failure of the United States hinges on issues like abortion that directly addresses our spiritual

⁵ Also, deregulation, the centerpiece of Reaganomics, produced turmoil in many major industries. Most notably perhaps, the Savings and Loan fiasco traces back directly to deregulation. It contributed hundreds of billions of dollars to the national deficit.

convictions. Most importantly, "spiritual values alone are essential to our nations health and vigor" (State of the Union Address 1988). Using similar moral arguments linked directly to the eventual rise or decline of the nation, Reagan likewise advocated enforced prayer in public schools (Le Jon 1988).

In order to amplify the internal threats that the outgroup poses, the leader often creates or greatly exaggerates threats posed by some external enemy—in the form of the Other. For Reagan, the Soviet Union posed the external threat, or more exactly, the mythic Evil Empire over which Communism, the unholy state religion, ruled with an iron fist.⁶ In reference to the Soviet Union, Reagan claimed that

the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat, in order to attain that... (Presidential News Conference Jan. 29th, 1981).

Reagan identifies the Soviet Union as the Other, the embodiment of everything contrary and threatening to our own virtue, with no redeeming qualities. So beyond the somewhat practical necessity to combat the threat of Soviet world domination, Reagan also framed the issue in higher moral terms that supersede our immediate political or economic interests. Confrontations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. signify an ultimate and ongoing struggle between the forces of good and evil. It is:

an obligation to the God who guides us, an obligation to the heritage of liberty and dignity handed down to us by our forefathers, and the obligation to the children of the world, whose future will be shaped by the way we live our lives today (Christmas Speech 1983. New York Times. Dec.).

For Reagan, foreign policy should not form around rational assessment of political, strategic, or material economic interests, or an estimation of what each side might be willing to give and take in negotiations. Instead, Reagan viewed the U.S.-Soviet confrontation as

⁶ Here again Reagan's ideology takes an ironic twist. On the one hand, Reagan wants to guarantee prayer in public schools, and in the process, establish a link between church and state—in effect, a state religion. At the same time, he attacks the Soviet Union for promoting a state religion that suppresses dissident beliefs. The decisive difference lies not in a more or less exclusive state religion, but rather that our religion will be the dominant one, and not somebody else's. Typical of authoritarianism is a contradictory belief that government should not interfere in private matters, but also that we need a strong government to instill order, that is, the order that represents our interests (whomever one feels allegiance towards) over and against any competing interests (Adorno 1950, p.654-726). The leader must have the moral strength and will to resist rampant corruption to reestablish a just society.

an absolute battle between two clearly and discretely demarcated sides—us against them.

Through rhetoric, Reagan constantly delivered emotional appeal, with the need to maintain above all commitment to moral values and enthusiasm. The quasi-religious Reagan administration consistently applied moral solutions built on beliefs of ingroup righteousness that overcomes all adversity if it maintains the necessary self-discipline and vigilance. In practical terms, such approaches become not only ineffectual and haphazard, but more severely, “it shows not only a kind of collective inability to cope with complexity” since it divides the world into clear cut dichotomies, “but also an unwillingness to examine our present predicament seriously” (Dallek 1984, p.164).

Reagan consistently portrayed issues in dichotomous terms, us against them, good against evil, lazy against the hard working, virtuous against the perverse, etc. He claimed that AIDS was a “gay disease sent by God as punishment.” The tragic folly of this belief is apparent. Nevertheless, Reagan quickly dismissed attempts to complicate issues as fabrications of bureaucrats, intellectual elites, the liberal media, and so on. Overall, “Reagan’s use of antithesis renders the complexities of the modern world manageable by framing the world into a set of relatively simple oppositions and easily understood problems” (Jasinski 1992, p.127). In this way, Reagan’s politics provided an easy and instant gratification of emotional longing for meaning, order, and direction. His rhetoric does not deny complexities so much as it neutralizes complex relations by combining opposition into a single position. For example, Reagan’s rhetoric implicitly held that “the problem of building community, paradoxically, is solved by emphasizing individualism” (Jasinski 1992, p.129); we need to build community and collective strength as a nation by promoting absolute individuality.

Similarly, Reagan distilled Soviet-U.S. political relations down to a simple oxymoron: peace through superior firepower. Only through confrontation can cooperation develop. However, no amount of firepower is ever enough, because we must remain vigilant against the forces that constantly threaten the United States. Even cursory consideration reveals that such a policy only perpetuates the confrontation stage, and inherently precludes the cooperation stage. Since the nemesis is inherently evil, we must prepare ourselves for sacrifices if necessary because the enemy will never relent and their success automatically means our doom.

As a political (and charismatic) figure, Ronald Reagan for the masses exists through the mass media. Only the means of mass information distribution can carry Reagan’s message to the people, and likewise, only the media can question him about policy, ostensibly as a voice of the people. Reagan, like most popular figures today, does not directly engage in public discourse face to face with the public through town hall meetings or local community discourse. People depend on the mass media to engage a discourse with political figures, to ask the questions that people would ask if they could. Otherwise, the communication process operates only in one direction. Regarding politics, arrangements that allow only one-way communication and prevent any response, sometimes acquire the term ‘propaganda.’ The mass media did not usually challenge Reagan, and more often functioned uncritically as a mouthpiece for his many proclamations (Adams 1983; Germond and Witcover 1981; Heertsgaard 1988).

Despite the emotional basis of the charismatic claim, the leader often attempts to bolster the claim by creating a supposed rational veneer. Nazi scientists presented all sorts of data, based on (completely unreliable and invalid) research, which demonstrated, for example, the inferiority of various subhuman races. Nazi archaeologists uncovered all sorts of (completely fabricated) artifacts that proved a former Aryan civilization (whose symbol was the swastika) once encompassed all of Europe, built the wonders of the ancient world, and extended all the way to India.

Reagan often similarly delivered numerous purported facts and statistics to support his argument. He often related rumors and half-truths, which he may have heard or read somewhere, as established fact (Germond and Witcover 1981). Most commonly, his stories “were exaggerated... and many of them were beyond verification... but they made his argument, and only nitpicking reporters occasionally raised the question of his playing fast and loose with the facts” (Germond and Witcover 1981, p.211). But the accuracy of the facts themselves is not really the issue.

Rather, in the political arena of charismatic authority, facts are really just words, and when the political figure conveys the ‘facts’ through television, they become even more symbolic. In that case, the ‘truth’ depends on the relative believability of the presenter, that is, the charismatic strength as perceived by the public. The political figure claims to be a professional, expert, or in the case of Reagan, the true and righteous representative of the public (or constituency) who are in this relationship, non-professional or followers:

The political field is thus the site of a competition for power which is carried out by means of a competition for the control of non-professionals or, more precisely, for the monopoly of the right to speak and act in the name of some or all of the non-professionals. ...The power of the ideas that he proposes is measured not, as in the domain of science, by their truth value (even if they owe part of their power to his capacity to convince people that he is in possession of the truth) but by the power of mobilization that they contain, in other words, by the power of the group that recognizes them (Bourdieu 1991, p.190).

In other words, political rhetoric is truthful to the extent people perceive the purveyor as truthful, and whom they want to believe. Yet this truthfulness differs from rational and critical accuracy, but rather becomes more a matter of faith—who do we believe is telling the truth, rather than who can demonstrate the truth with evidence. People believed because they wanted to believe Reagan, so his message, his Word, consequently mobilized support at the ballot box.

The Aftermath of Charisma

Most charismatic leaders, such as Hitler, Mussolini, Peron, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Napoleon, and the petty 'dictators,' such as Manson, Koresh, and Jim Jones, share the common aftermath that their countries and followers met with ruin and death. Similarly, though perhaps not as severely, Reagan left the country with an enormous debt, a ruined Savings and Loan system, disrupted social support networks, extensive abject poverty, homelessness, decaying infrastructure, neglected public schools, and severe rollbacks on environmental protection and worker rights. His administration legitimated illegal espionage (Iran-Contra). Reagan's charismatic policies justified a military build-up of unprecedented proportions that bankrupted the Soviet Union and precipitated its collapse, leaving a country in turmoil with a wrecked infrastructure and a dead economy.

In the realm of political discourse in the United States, the Reagan era also leaves a mark. In the first post-Reagan election, "the 1988 presidential campaign had all the ingredients of ceremonial discourse. It was the politics of personality and pathos, not reason. Patriotism and personal integrity, not policy prescriptions, became the major concerns" (Weiler and Pearce 1992, p.41). In the recent Republican and Democratic conventions, the nominations of Dole and Clinton, not to mention the party platforms, were never in doubt. Decided long in advance despite sometimes intense disagreement on certain

issues, such as abortion, candidates seem to vehemently avoid substantive issues and emphasize instead personal integrity, honesty, trustworthiness. Whether Democrat or Republican, the messages usually depend on a crude tautology: 'you can trust me to fight for your interests, because I am trustworthy.' This sort of mindlessness would be humorous, but unfortunately it conceals a brutal reality of issues such as lack of access to adequate health care, systematic incarceration of economically borderline population groups, extensive environmental degradation, a declining educational system, perpetuation of poverty, the violence of desperation—and many others. This flight from reality, and public preference for domination, more than anything else, characterizes the Reagan legacy.

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ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHARACTER¹

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The term "social character" is at the center of Erich Fromm's psychoanalytical thought. The significance of this term in Fromm's approach to psychoanalysis, how he understands it, how it is molded and what its function is will be the first topic of this paper. Since I have already dealt with the concept of social character elsewhere, I would like to confine myself to a summary and say some words on the background against which Fromm developed his psychoanalytical approach.

The term "social character" emerges only at the end of the 1930's. A first systematic description can be found in the appendix of the book *Escape from Freedom* in the year 1941. The idea behind the concept of "social character", however, had taken shape in Fromm's mind much earlier.

The Fromm literature either connects his own psychoanalytical approach to the Freudo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School or to Harry Stack Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationship. It is certainly true that Fromm formulated his own (namely social-psychologically-oriented) psychoanalytical approach within the context of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. The argument with the members of the Institute in the late thirties, especially Horkheimer, Marcuse, and to a lesser extent Adorno, was sparked off by Freudian instinct theory. Their argument can only be understood if the specifically Frommian approach connecting sociological and psychological thought is taken into account. It was not developed only in the context of the Frankfurt School, but ten years earlier in Fromm's dissertation in 1922 (cf. Fromm 1989b).

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